

Mind the Gap: Episode 289

Elena: If you've ever wondered why a client isn't doing what they say they want to do, and you're tempted to label it as resistance, this episode is for you. Hello friends and welcome to the Bright Morning Podcast. I'm your host Elena Aguilar, and in each episode you will learn how to lead conversations that build connection and spark change.

Today we are talking about one of the most transformative tools I have ever used in coaching the gaps framework. It is simple and powerful and often the key to moving a conversation forward when it feels stuck. So let's get into it. Let me take you back to a moment. Early in my coaching career, I was working with a teacher, I'm gonna call him Jordan.

He was bright. Passionate and deeply committed to supporting his students. And he had just finished a PD series and he told me, I want to increase student engagement. I know it matters. So we brainstormed. I shared resources and I modeled strategies, and he nodded along and then nothing changed. Week after week, I would visit his classroom and see the same routines, the same missed opportunities.

And I will admit it was frustrating. And I started to wonder, did he actually want to grow? Was he just saying what I wanted to hear in coaching conversations? And then I caught myself and I paused. And I remembered something that I'd learned just a few months earlier, which was when people don't change their behavior, it's normally not due to a lack of desire, but instead it's a lack of an undiagnosed underlying factor, or in many cases, factors.

Plural. So that knowledge is what drove me to assemble the gaps framework. So this is a tool that invites us to ask a better question, not why won't they change, but what might be getting in the way. So I got curious. I stopped pushing and I started listening. And when Jordan and I had our next conversation, I asked, I'm wondering what's feeling hard about trying some of these new strategies and Jordan side and said, honestly, I am just exhausted.

I feel like I barely have the emotional energy to get through the day. I wanna try new things, but it's like I can't add one more thing. So that was it. He wasn't experiencing a will gap. This was a capacity gap, maybe an emotional intelligence gap. And once I heard that I knew what to do, we talked about how to deal with the emotional load.

We found a smaller entry point, just one manageable adjustment that he felt okay trying and the following week he did it. Just that one step, one shift, and that's the power of the gaps framework. So let's break this down. This framework helps you identify six different kinds of gaps that might be getting in the way of someone's progress.

So I'm going to tell you what these are. The first one is a skill gap, which means that they don't yet have the technical ability to do something. The second kind of gap is a knowledge gap, which means they're missing the background information or the theory or the why. The third gap is a capacity gap, which means they don't have the time or the energy or the resources.

The fourth gap is a will gap, which means they're not motivated or invested. The fifth gap is an emotional intelligence gap. And this means that they're struggling with self-awareness, self-regulation, or managing interpersonal emotions. And the sixth gap is a cultural competence gap, which means they lack the skills or awareness to navigate cultural differences or build inclusive relationships.

So here's why all of this matters. So often when someone isn't doing what we want them to do or what they say they want to do, we can assume that they aren't trying. But most of the time it's not about willingness. It's about a gap in readiness or understanding or support. So the Gaps Framework gives us a compassionate, concrete way to explore what might be really going on.

Now, let me tell you how to use it in a conversation. When a client is stuck or struggling, then pause and reflect what kind of gap might be present here. Is it something they don't know, something they don't know how to do? Or something deeper, like something emotional or cultural or circumstantial. And if you're not sure, you can name the tool.

You can say something like, sometimes I found it's helpful to think in terms of learning gaps, for example. Is this about skill, capacity, emotional energy? Can we think through this together? So the key here is to stay curious and nonjudgmental and supportive. And let me remind you of something really important, which is that we all have gaps.

We all have areas for growth. So this framework isn't about labeling someone, it's about helping them grow. It's about coaching people as learners, not performers. So the more you can normalize gaps in your mind and with your clients, the less scary it will feel for them to explore and reveal their gaps to you and to themselves.



And that is critical for a strong coaching relationship where learning can occur. If this resonates with you and you want help integrating the Gaps Framework into your coaching, then we have created a skill session, which is in the coach learning library that shows you exactly how to do this, and the skill session walks you through real coaching, language, conversation structures, and common missteps to avoid.

You can also download a free Gaps Framework visual. It is simple and it's clear, and it's a great reminder to keep at your desk or in a coaching binder. So here's a challenge for you this week. Think about a client who is stuck and then try using the Gaps Framework to name what kinds of support they might need and what kind of questions could open a new path forward.

Okay. If you wanna keep learning with me and deepen your ability to coach with clarity, compassion, and purpose, then check out the show notes to learn more about our coach learning library and PLC, and you'll also find a link to our upcoming free community webinars. Thank you for being here with me today, and if this episode gave you a new perspective, and if you're listening via podcast, then please share it with someone you know who could benefit from it and or you could leave us a five star rating and review on Apple Podcasts to help others discover this show.

Now, if you're watching on YouTube and this sparked something for you, then give it a like, and also share it with a colleague. If you're not watching on YouTube yet, come over and join us and you will find a link to our channel in the show notes. All right, LesLee Bickford is the podcast producer and Stacey Goodman, does the sound engineering be well everyone?